

Two longstanding Sri Lankan Trotskyists die

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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It is with great sadness that the Socialist Equality Party reports that two longstanding party comrades died on Saturday. We pay tribute to their intransigent fight over decades for the perspective of Trotskyism in the Sri Lankan working class. We extend our condolences to their family members.

Comrade Leela Balasuriya passed away on Saturday morning, December 13, after losing consciousness. She had been bedridden for three months after a fall caused by a sudden complication due to high blood pressure. She was from Dompe, 32 kilometres from Colombo. Her funeral took place yesterday.

Leela joined the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the forerunner of the SEP, in 1974 and devoted herself to party work until she was prevented from doing so over the past six months because of her illness. She was a government employee who lost her job when the right-wing United National Party (UNP) government sacked 100,000 public sector workers to crush the 1980 general strike.

She played a significant role in the RCL's political struggle against the 1970–1977 coalition government led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), that included the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Stalinist Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL). She was prominent in opposing the bureaucratic leadership of the All Ceylon Government Clerical Employees Union, which was dominated by CPSL Stalinists.

Comrade R.M. Gunathilake also died on Saturday after suffering from chronic illnesses for some time, no doubt compounded a lifetime of the difficult conditions facing workers in Sri Lanka.

Gunathilake joined the RCL in 1970, just two years after the party was formed. He was a Ceylon Transport Board worker and faced witch hunts instigated by LSSP trade union leaders for seeking to mobilise opposition against the austerity policies of the SLFP-

led coalition government. Gunathilake was a longstanding Central Committee member of the RCL/SEP.

Gunathilake was also among the 100,000 public sector employees sacked by the UNP government in its repression of the July 1980 general strike. He was reinstated after 14 years.

He lived in Hali-Ela in Badulla, a major tea plantation district. He remained active in party political work until recurring illness prevented him from continuing two years ago.



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